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Need for a joint intelligence team in the field to sift and synthesize the raw minutiae of rebellion.

THE ASSESSMENT OF INSURGENCY

Edward T. Schwarzchild

Understanding and keeping abreast of the situation in an insurgency is difficult in the field and even more difficult in Washington. The military features are only one aspect of the course of a social and political revolution, and the questions that must be answered range over all categories of intelligence, for example: What full-time guerrilla units are there, and where are they? What heavy weapons do they have? How many men deserted from them last month? What is the price and the availability of basic foodstuffs? What foreign advisors do the insurgents have? Has there been a recent shift in their propaganda lines? How, and how effectively, do they control the population in their areas? How do the various tribal minorities think and behave? How deep-seated are their grievances?

The volume of raw data bearing on these questions is often very large. To ascertain the attitudes of the populace toward the insurgents in a given province, one needs to scan the records of defector interrogations and reports from agents, patrols, central government officers, and U.S. personnel—reports which may total tens of thousands of words. Similarly, great volume is a prerequisite in developing order-of-battle information from individual reports which may be vague, fragmentary, unprofessional, and occasionally mistaken or self-contradictory. It was possible in Laos, for example, using only low-level, untrained or little-trained informants, to compile a list of Kong Le units and strengths in most provinces which proved to be ninety percent accurate and ninety percent complete, but it required a multitude of reports over a period of five months to do so.

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The Problem of Synthesis

The information on an insurgency that reaches Washington, under present procedures, is by and large not the answers to the elementary questions but the raw minutiae. As the field units of the several intelligence agencies concerned with insurgents in a given country forward their reports (immediately or ultimately) to the Washington community is presented with data in enormous quantity and complicated detail. Many reports are disseminated describing events down to the village level. The problem is thus not the availability of data but its meaning in terms of the questions to be answered. Washington analysts are in a poorer position than people in the field to sift such quantities of data and find the meaning. They are not likely to have the familiarity with the situation or the feel for it which one can acquire in the field.

Consider a hypothetical case. A central government army battalion in a remote area engages platoon-strength insurgent patrols four times in six weeks. Every time the enemy flees as quickly as possible; the firefights are brief and inconclusive. As these actions are reported, they look to Washington like routine, isolated skirmishes. But they occur in an area where skirmishes have previously been only about half so frequent, and they all involve the same company of the battalion, one in a river valley leading to a neighboring province. From a village some distance inside that province's border it was recently reported that a number of young men had vanished, and in the battalion's area the villagers recently began begging the central government for rice. A field analyst in close touch with the situation may recognize these coincidences and deduce that local insurgent activity is concentrated on infiltrating and recruiting in the neighboring province. The harried analyst in Washington would not be likely to.

What is needed is an arrangement to collect in one place in the field all relevant bits of information, sort out the significant, and relate different kinds of information, such as economic and military, to each other. Then it would be possible to reduce the volume of low-level, immediately meaningless data disseminated in Washington, and in the field as well, to people who cannot devote full time to interpreting it, to in-

crease the proportion of obviously significant information reported, and so to present a clearer picture of the situation.

A Solution

The best way to fill this need would be to create a small intelligence staff reporting to the country team. The staff should report to the country team so as to have both access to command levels and enough latent bureaucratic horsepower to encourage cooperation from the lower echelons of the collecting agencies. It should include officers (workers, not spokesmen) of the major agencies involved. A composite group is necessary because a variety of professionals can understand the complex problems of insurgency better than a group from only one organization.

Such a staff, clearly one logical solution with respect to insurgent countries where U.S. military operations are minimal, as in Laos, would have advantages even under massive U.S. military involvement, as in Vietnam, over the alternative of centering all intelligence in the military, aided or augmented by civilian elements. The composite group suggested would have a greater range of skills, be more likely to weigh non-military factors fully, and enjoy in forming its conclusions a greater detachment from the immediate worries of those directing military operations.

The composition and functioning of such a staff in prototype are described below, for the sake of concreteness, in some detail. With adjustments to the peculiarities of different situations, the prototype should be suitable for use against insurgents anywhere.

The titular chief of the staff should probably be CIA's chief of station, in his capacity of coordinator of intelligence activities. Its *working* director, however, should be chosen not by his organizational affiliation but for his personal qualifications. He must be able to weld together a staff of people from different agencies; he must know how to entice full cooperation from all elements of the local intelligence community; and he must understand a military campaign permeated with political considerations.

The staff, drawn from the military services present, CIA, USOM, and USIS, should be kept small, not to exceed Parkin-

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son's seven. CIA and the military will in practice furnish most of the members. Its job is to produce regular assessments of the situation and estimate the insurgents' capabilities and intentions. It will produce monthly and perhaps weekly studies covering the entire country by region or province. If it fails to reach full agreement on any substantive point, the dissents will be noted in its published report.

The staff will also produce occasional special studies as required, but it should be wary of honoring requests to the point of building up a workload that might force it to expand. Similarly, it will sometimes want to make suggestions to some of the operating intelligence units as it identifies gaps and recognizes effective intelligence-gathering techniques, but it should avoid getting involved in operations.

The staff members should be senior enough that their parent organizations' people will respect and cooperate with them but not so elevated as to be no longer workers. They should have had upcountry experience in some capacity involving contact with the farmers and ordinary townsmen so as to understand their sources and targets. They should be particularly interested and well read in insurgency. In aggregate they should have or should develop a capability to translate the major languages of the country.

The work should be so organized that each man follows the situation in one particular area but his temporary absence does not leave the staff without expertise in that area. This requires overlapping areas of responsibility: if, for example, there are six staff members covering six regions of the country, each should read also all the available information on one or two regions adjacent to that on which he writes the periodic reports.

The staff will require a support section of several clerks, not only to type and reproduce its studies but to extract, file, and cross-reference for easy recovery the tens of thousands of bits of information to be used. It will need a war room, or at least access to one nearby, where there are wall maps showing the entire country at one or two fairly small scales (say 1:500,000 and 1:1,000,000) and at least its critical regions at larger scales (1:250,000 to 1:50,000). Also here should be stocked individual sheets of the best maps at every

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scale, plus any special-purpose maps available (for example the Army Map Service's magnificent Tactical Commander's Terrain Analysis series). It would be useful, though not essential, to have as chief of the support section an Army specialist (E-6 or E-7) trained in order-of-battle reporting and analysis. Such a man would know maps, would understand what files are needed, and might prove useful in informal liaison with Army elements.

Such a staff will not solve all the problems of processing intelligence on insurgents, but it can solve some, if its members are well chosen with an eye to their professional and personal qualifications. To consolidate a group of men from different agencies into an effective working unit will be an extraordinarily delicate task. But insurgency is extraordinary, posing intelligence problems too large, too complicated, too detailed, and too fast-moving to be handled by procedures designed for other times and other information.

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